THE REDBIRD WORD

Volume 100 Issue 3 **Celebrating 100 years!**

Alton High School, 4200 Humbert Rd., Alton, Ill. 62002, Room B136

Table of contents

Oh Look, a Kitten! 3

Friday Night Flag 5

One Goal at a Time 6

Heroes Among Us 7

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor-In-Chief	Leigha Cole
Social Media Manager	Lydia Copeland
Social Media Manager	Raye Holmes
Web Editor	Kolten Clore
Photo/Art Editor	Juliette Meza
Broadcast Editor	Garrett Stafford
News Editor	Finn Lile
Features Editor	Lily Waltz
Sports Editor	Kyridas Orr
Sports Editor	Heaven Everage
Copy Editor	Stella Cowan
Copy Editor	Victoria Strowmatt
Featured Reporters	

Editorial policy: The Redbird Word and The Daily Bird operate as public forums of expression. Readers can email letters to the editor at the.redbird.word@gmail.com Expressions made in these student-led publications are in no way an expression of the district or the school board.

ABOUT THE COVER

Senior defensive coach, Brayden Drew, rallies girls' defense line including [clockwise] Anna Larson, Makenzie Rayfield, Hannah Curry, Andrea Hyman, Mackenzie Cochran, Stella Cowan, Eden Hough, Paige White and Adrianna Webb, in a celebratory huddle at the end of the final practice before the annual juniors versus seniors 2025 PowerPuff game on Nov. 7.
Photo by Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

Follow us on our social media!
@the_dailybird

DISCIPLINE DISAGREEMENTS

Students Struggle with Shifts in Administration

By Stella Cowan, Copy Editor

The District Improvement Plan is a citywide project implemented within all Alton School District buildings. Its primary goal is to build a stronger, higher-performing community through the division of three main sub-goals.

These goals, according to Alton's 2025-26 planning spreadsheet, are to create a culture of belonging through dignity, provide grade-appropriate instruction and assignments and build professional learning communities (PLCs) that drive results.

"Our attendance is up and our tardies are down…in just a short time. We have seen improvements from last year to this year," assistant principal Natalie Gordon said.

However, in a speech given by Superintendent, Elaine Kane, on Nov. 5 as part of the Reimagine Alton event, district-wide attendance rates were shown to have remained relatively stagnant across the past two years.

Participants, ranging from teachers to administrators to parents, were asked for ideas on how to improve attendance rates. High school students who were asked for feedback suggested that administrators within the school could attempt to facilitate a more welcoming and respectful environment.

"I've had issues this year and I've never had issues before," senior Tiffany Zheng said. "I tried to talk to one of the assistant principals about it and I feel like she wasn't listening to any of my points."

In two senior early bird classes with an average of 25 students each, roughly half of each class voiced concerns over the correlation between tardies and the OpenGate Weapons Detection system.

They felt that the increase in security and discipline regulations is creating a tense atmosphere between the student body and administrators.

"I don't think the new rules and tardy sweep policies were ever clearly stated or even mentioned," senior Oren Asher said. "This year I have been marked tardy multiple times even when I arrived in the line on time."

Several other students agreed, stating that they hadn't even heard of a tardy sweep before being sent to discipline.

Asher recalls being aggressively interrupted and berated as though he were a small child during one such tardy sweep—and he's not the only one with similar experiences.

Zheng, who brought a blunt pair of children's safety scissors through Open Gate for a project, said that she expected they might be confiscated at the doors and returned to her at the end of the day.

"They just took them and threw them on the ground," Zheng said. "I watched them slide across the floor, and I don't know if anyone picked them up after I left. I feel like that was really disrespectful."

While safety is important and students are responsible for their own actions, the intensity of disciplinary action this year has taken some students by surprise.

However, not all students respond negatively to staff interaction.

In a survey conducted by The Redbird Word staff that recorded how supported students felt at school, over half of the 10 juniors and seniors who responded reported feeling supported by their teachers in some way.

Trends in statements show that outside of an aversion towards increased disciplinary action surrounding tardies, the student body is generally satisfied with teachers, security officers, resource officers and other staff members. Bitterness towards administration seems correlated to lack of fair warning before disciplinary action.

Students who were interviewed both in-person and via the survey said that they valued positive interactions with administration.

"Students would feel more welcomed and comfortable at school if the adults in charge listened to us and tried to communicate with us," Zheng said.

Themes in student discussion revolve around the want for more direct information to make its way to students before disciplinary action does.

Alton District Improvement Plan
2025-2026
Goal #1
Create a Culture of Belonging Through Dignity
• Engage with parents via ParentSquare
• Track and analyze attendence rates
• Celebrate successes
Goal #2
Grade Appropriate Instruction and Assignments
• Monitor Common Assessment data
• Carry out Result-Oriented Practices
Goal #3
Effective PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) that Drive Results
• Monitor grades weekly
• Student conference to discuss progress/needed support
Average percentage of students present every day during quarter one: 80%
Average percentage of 4th-12th grade students passing all classes during quarter one: 73%

Created by Stella Cowan

Theatre Department Opens Fall Play Highlighting Digital Distractions

By Lydia Copeland, Social Media Manager

After weeks of rehearsals, the theater department raised the curtains for the debut of the fall play "The Internet is a Distraction...Oh Look, a Kitten!"

The play centers around the main character, Micah. Micah attempts to write a paper on the classic novel "The Great Gatsby" while trying to avoid the many distractions of the internet.

This theme targets a young demographic who can often relate to the struggles of keeping a focused mindset while living in a digital age.

"I feel that I definitely relate to the themes of the play," sophomore Ella Beauchamp, who play the role of Taylor, said. "When it comes to schoolwork, I tend to become sidetracked and do anything but what I'm supposed to do."

Auditions took place on Sept. 2. This provided the cast seven weeks of rehearsal leading to opening night. While the audition process as a whole went smoothly, there was an overall lack of involvement.

"It [the audition process] went well," Theater Director Kristi Doering. "I always wish more students would show up though."

Despite being a freshman, Amelia Harner was cast as the lead role of Micah. Harner initially auditioned for a smaller role as this is her first production with the high school. however, she was ultimately given the lead. Harner said that despite the struggle of having to balance both school work and the play, she believes that it's worth it.

"I wasn't necessarily ready for a bigger role, but I'm really excited about it, and I'm really blessed to have gotten the role that I got," Harner said. "I had to balance a lot with school work while memorizing lines which is a lot of work, and I have a lot of lines."

Rehearsals began on Sept. 8 and took place every weekday from 3:30-5 p.m. with extra rehearsals being scheduled on weekends as needed. As opening night approached, cast members would often be asked to stay later to insure the play met their standards. The early rehearsals focused on making sure the actors knew their lines while the later rehearsals focused on tech aspects of the show.

"A specific obstacle I've had for this show have been lines," Beauchamp said. "This is one of the biggest parts I've had and it can be a struggle, but I have been managing well."

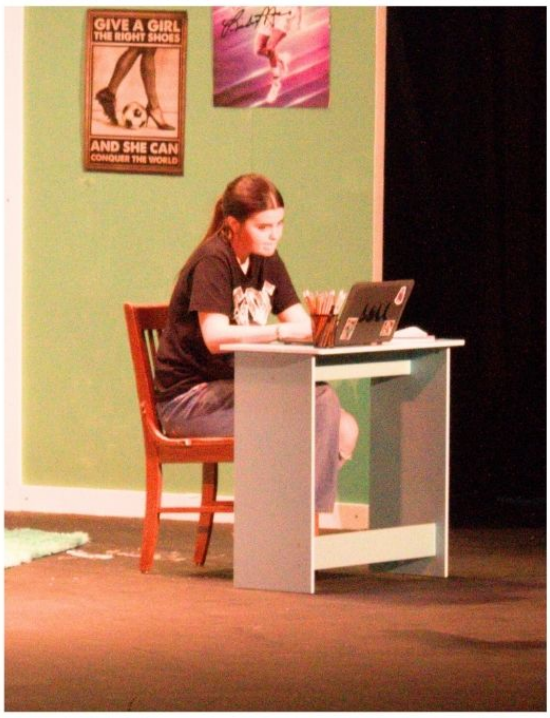
The theater department often goes beyond just acting; it can foster community. The department can help provide an environment for students to flourish not just as actors or actresses, but as people.

"I auditioned for the play because being in theatre is such a safe place for me and surrounds me with an amazing group of people," Beauchamp said.

Opening night was Oct. 23, being followed by performances on Oct. 24 and 25. The show was well received by audiences.

"The fall play was a very fast-paced show, but well worth the watch," senior Addison Harris said. "I think it spread a good message about the internet."

Sophomore Ella Beauchamp portrays character Taylor texting her friend.
Photo by Lydia Copeland, Social Media Manager



Freshman Amelia Harner portrays character Micha signing up for the app Tinder.
Photo by Lydia Copeland, Social Media Manager

OH LOOK, A KITTEN!

Alton Little Theater Unites People From All Over the Community

By Raye Holmes, Social Media Manager

On opening night at the Alton Little Theater, viewers find their seats in a dim auditorium, after scanning their tickets, waiting for the lights to dim completely; hinting that the show is finally starting. When the lights do dim, the viewers are ready to see actors of all ages from their community perform on stage.

The Alton Little Theater (ALT) is currently running their ninety-second season. Founded in 1933 by Dorothy Colonius, it is the longest-running community theater in Illinois.

During the month of November, the theater is hosting the play "Twelve Angry Men," directed by Kristi Doering. The play takes place in the 50's and is about 12 jurors selected for a murder trial of a boy rumored to have killed his father.

Doering said she did not select the play herself, rather it was chosen for her because of her directing style. She added that even though it was not her choice, she does love the show and what it represents.

The play features actors of all kinds as well as different types of characters.

"Unlike other productions, where there might be supporting characters, '12 [Angry] Men' is different from that," Nick McCauley, who plays juror number 5, said. "There is a clear main character, juror number 8 ... but everyone puts in their two sense."

Along with having a main character, the play also features an antagonist, which becomes clear as the play progresses.

"I am the antagonist, ... I am the last person to say not guilty, and the most angry violent dude in the room," Jordan Broyles, who plays juror number 3, said. "... I wanted to do something that felt different from my personality, challenge myself a bit and take on a bigger role than I have in the past."

Some of the actors have been in the ALT community for more than a couple of years. Though some have only joined the ALT this most recent year. Most of them joined the theater community in high school.

"I really wanted to get back into theater; I did it in high school," Cameron Ellington, who plays juror number 2, said. "It was kind of refreshing to get back into something I've always had a passion for."

They have rehearsal Tuesdays through Thursdays for two hours each day. Not including the hours they put in to rehearse their lines on their own.

"I love the process, the whole process from auditions to performance," John Kirkpatrick, juror number 1, said. "I don't view it as you have to clock in these hours."

The theater brings people of all ages together as a community. They host shows intended for different audiences. Actors of all ages can audition depending on the play.

"It's just a wonderful place to come together and put on a live performance for people, it's like a family to me," Kirkpatrick, said.

"I think the theater community is great; you meet a lot of people and it's a great outlet artistically," Broyles added.

"Twelve Angry Men" opens tonight at 7:30 p.m. The tickets are $25 per ticket and they have showtimes up to Nov 23.

For more information on tickets visit their website altonlittletheater.org.

Sawyer Burton, juror number 8, reads lines on his script before his turn to speak.
Photo by Raye Holmes, Social Media Manager

The actors run their lines arguing whether the kid is guilty or not, trying to convince one another of their views.
Photo by Raye Holmes, Social Media Manager

ENCORE

Senior PowerPuff quarterback, Grace Massey, steps to pass the ball to receiver during the final practice before gameday.
Photo by Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

Senior defensive coach, Brayden Drew, explains the upcoming play during practice to the seniors at Alton Public School Stadium.
Photo by Garrett Stafford, Broadcast Editor

Senior Mackenzie Cochran runs a defensive play during practice the week prior to gameday with coach Brayden Drew.
Photo by Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

Girls Take the Gridiron: PowerPuff Game Brings School Spirit to the Field

By Garrett Stafford, Broadcast Editor
Edited by Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

PowerPuff highlights the novelty of women playing a stereotypically "male" sport. Over time, it also became a symbol of school spirit, inclusivity and friendly competition.

Modern-day PowerPuff has since changed rules and how they play the game. Now students swap roles as the girls are playing flag football and the boys switch over to coaching and cheerleading.

The annual PowerPuff game was Friday, Nov. 7 at the Alton Public School Stadium from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Juniors and seniors prepared with practices throughout the week of Oct. 27 through Nov. 2. The junior-senior rivalry gets intense during this time of year leading up to the big game.

"The kids really look forward to it because of the junior-senior rivalry," senior team sponsor, Chelsea Anderson, said. "Especially the girls, because this time they get to play football, and this time the boys get to coach and be cheerleaders."

Players have been exclaiming their excitement with the upcoming game.

"As a senior, this game means we need to leave with a victory and have as much fun as possible," senior Rayna Raglin said.

Senior players shared their remorse as this is the last PowerPuff game they will have in high school.

"It's a little sad knowing that there isn't another game in the future, but I'm excited to see what the future holds for the class of 2026," Raglin added.

Senior Gentry Parko will be cheerleading on the sidelines and shared his insight on the upcoming game.

"The thing I'm most excited for is hopefully being a part of the winning team," Parko said. "If we lose, it would be disappointing to end our high school PowerPuff game on a loss."

Parko shared how students plan to get the fans excited during the game.

"Getting the crowd fired up is the easiest thing to do," Parko said. "We are going to have a pyramid of the biggest guys on the cheer squad."

Raglin gave her opinion on how they can improve scheduling next year for the future PowerPuff games.

"I would advise the sophomores to be organized and considerate when scheduling powder puff practices," Raglin said. "This would allow the players to be prepared for the competitive game that comes faster than expected."

The classic rivalry was formed to raise funds for students across the Alton School District with an entry fee of $5 and available concessions.

Boys Soccer Takes the Field

By *Kyridas Orr, Sports Editor*

The Alton High School boys' soccer team is making strides this season continuing to establish itself as a competitive force this season.

The Redbirds are 6-9 overall and 1-6 in conference play, but the team has impressed with its determination, improvement and commitment to a fast-paced, gritty style of soccer. Despite the losing record, players and coaches said there's been noticeable growth on the field.

"The team has progressed well throughout the season," senior Blake Rensing said. "We started off slow, but we started to pick it up and play together."

That improved chemistry has helped the Redbirds become more competitive in recent weeks. After a tough start that included a string of narrow losses, the team has begun to find its rhythm. The team still faced challenges at the beginning of the season due to a lack of returning players.

"The loss of players who did not return for their senior season was tough," senior Nicholas Tuetken said. "However, we found the determination to put in the extra kick to defeat some of the stellar teams in our conference."

Despite losing players, the team continues to show up and perform for each other and their school. On the field, the team can be seen working as a unit to bring home a win against their opponents.

Seniors like Tuetken have taken on leadership roles, encouraging younger players to stay focused and motivated as the team continues to grow and develop.

"My teammates and I are close like family and help each other stride for greatness and bettering each other on and off the field," Tuetken said.

That bond has become a defining characteristic of this year's squad. Whether in training sessions, on the bus to away games, or during tough conference matchups, the Redbirds have continued to build a culture based on effort, respect and accountability.

Several underclassmen have also stepped up, gaining valuable varsity experience and showing promise for the program's future. Younger players have embraced the challenge of filling key roles and learning from the seniors' leadership.

Junior Patrick Henesey stands and awaits for his opportunity to protect his goal.
Photo by Keagan Korte, Reporter

Sophomore Travon Hitchye-Randolph and junior Jude Cowan stride down the field.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

THE LOADING DOCK
ON THE RIVER
GRAFTON - ILLINOIS

HEROES AMONG US

Current welding teacher, Lucas Garibay, carries his supplies and blows a horn.
Photo Courtesy of Lucas Garibay

Current JOBO teacher Joe Michalski's Kevlar after taking hits from bomb fragments.
Photo Courtesy of Joe Michalski

Garibay poses while eating a scorpion.
Photo Courtesy of Lucas Garibay

Faces of Service: Veterans on Staff Share Their Stories

By Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

Many members of our staff served in different sections of the military across different decades and all have personal experiences that now help them as teachers. The skills learned while serving our country have given them a different perspective to education.

Welding teacher, Lucas Garibay, served from 2009 to 2013 in the Marine Corps. Throughout it all, he said he was always concerned about the possibility of going to war. Garibay was on a ship when the Fukushima earthquake hit.

"It felt like the ship dropped off a cliff and everyone fell out of their bunks," Garibay said. "Then the captain came on the intercom and explained what happened. He said an earthquake had hit Japan and we would be going to Japan to provide humanitarian aid which took us about a week to get to mainland Japan and provide the aid they needed."

After his time in the Marine Corps, Garibay moved on to a private sector of welding. He wanted to find a way to share his knowledge which led him to being a teacher.

"It has given me the opportunity to grow and become better as a person, at the same time introducing others to the welding trade," Garibay said.

Current School Resource Officer Brad Woefel kneels behind explosives during one of his tours.
Photo Courtesy of Brad Woefel

Another staff member, School Resource Officer Brad Woelfel also served in the Marine Corps. He served from 1997 to 2008. During the years he was on active duty, he went to the Mediterranean, Panama and other various countries.

"I was deployed on a Marine Expeditionary Unit to the Mediterranean Sea where our unit and the Navy assisted the Kosovo people after they were invaded and displaced by the Albanians," Woelfel said. "I was then deployed to Panama for three months in 1999 to assist in a peaceful turnover of the Canal to the Panamanian people."

Woelfel was also deployed to Iraq during the Iraq war. He was in charge of squad cars and commanded combat patrols.

"The craziest thing I experienced was the war in Iraq," Woelfel said. "Most days it was around 120 degrees, plus getting shot at and almost blown up every day."

Woefel poses with his companion.
Photo Courtesy of Brad Woefel

Michalski poses in front of a jail cell.
Photo Courtesy of Joe Michalski

Garibay takes a break after zip-lining in Thailand while on leave.
Photo Courtesy of Lucas Garibay

Michalski captures a picture of a burned five-ton truck.
Photo Courtesy of Joe Michalski

Woelfel graduated from Alton High School and came back to be a positive influence on the youth.

"Joining the Marine Corps was one of the best things I did with my life, and I never ever have to ask myself if I made a difference in the world because I know I did," Woelfel said. "I helped keep people safe all over the world and in turn I received an education, both academically and with a wealth of experiences."

JOBO teacher, Joe Michalski, was an educator before he enlisted to pay off his student loans. He served with a combat engineer battalion and was attached to the 42nd Infantry Division and the 101st airborne. Michalski often struggled with the moral side of being in the military.

"It was often very difficult to maintain a healthy perspective and not allow yourself to become desensitized to the human element," Michalski said. "I had to adapt to an environment I was not used to and face situations that could cause fellow soldiers, civilians and enemy combatants to lose their lives and or become severely maimed."

While on a trip to Samara, Michalski and his crew were struck by an Improvised Explosion Device (IED) and severely injured.
"I was blown to the curb, another guy was killed, and one guy lost his arm," Michalski said. "We then were caught in a high function ambush and could've been killed."

Despite going through almost dying and plenty of combat, Michalski continues to teach and help students every day.

"As a teacher and a veteran, I think it is important to do my best to help students realize the opportunities our country provides," Michalski said. "Helping students realize the power they have in finding their voice and becoming educated voters is exceptionally important."

The experiences of these veterans continue to shape their work in education. It offers students not only technical instruction, but also insight gained through years of service.

STREETS SPEAK OUT

Alton Protesters Stand Up and Fight for Democracy

By Kolten Clore, Web Editor

On Oct. 18, several hundred people took place in the national No Kings Day protest at the Lincoln-Douglas Square.

The protests centered around the nonviolent protesting of President Donald Trump's many controversial decisions and actions.

While multiple protests have been held in the preceding months by groups such as Alton People's United, this one was the largest group of demonstrators since the protests over the summer.

74-year-old Patricia Dietz of Edwardsville attended the No Kings Protest to show her support for protecting democracy.

Dietz said she felt compelled to go to the No Kings rally to express concern that Constitutional freedoms are at risk.

"I also attended for my children and grandchildren, so they will continue to have these freedoms," Dietz said.

Dietz said she has seen a lot of changes in the country over the years

"Of course there have always been policy differences, conservative, liberal or moderate. What is occurring now, does not include any of these principles," Dietz added. "Instead we are watching a systematic destruction of our government and democracy as our founding fathers intended."

Protesters held up various signs with statements including "Trans rights: Let them live their truth," "No King Here" and "Untrump The World."

Numerous passersby of the protest honked their horns to show support for their cause and no opposition appeared.

"I personally think protests are a good thing," junior Elias Clark said. "Especially when people think something is unjust or unfair. As long as they keep it peaceful, exercising their First Amendment is a good thing."

The No Kings Day protests have been peaceful while making themselves known to all without causing a disturbance to the day-to-day lives of bystanders.

Though it started to rain during the protest, most persevered and kept on protesting, with dozens of people remaining until the end of the protest.

Other smaller protests have continued weekly and have remained consistently peaceful and non-obstructive.

"...We should have the right to protest. A lot of countries don't have rights to protest. They don't have the first amendment, and they're utilizing our first amendment rights and everything," junior, Atticus Chapman said. "Some people have taken it to a very large extreme, which is not okay. Peacefully protesting is okay, and what was happening here was okay. And I agree with some things the protestors are saying, but not everything the protesters are saying."

Other protests have continued every Saturday for several months locally while hundreds more have taken place across the country and even in other countries.

Clayton Monroe, a protester, sits on top of the wall at the Lincoln-Douglas Square speaking with a megaphone.
Photo courtesy of All Things Alton

A large group of protesters continue on through the dim day.
Photo courtesy of All Things Alton

Protestors smile as they hold up their signs in front of the Lincoln-Douglas Square.
Photo courtesy of All Things Alton

HIDDEN HARDSHIPS

Confronting the Reality of Youth Homelessness

By Victoria Strowmatt, Copy Editor

November marks the start of Homeless Youth Awareness Month after Congress passed a bill in 2023 deeming it the designated month of awareness. This month acknowledges the ongoing issue of homelessness while students are under the age of 18.

As many as 2.5 million youth per year experience homelessness. Families experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience involvement in the child welfare system and difficulty with school attendance.

"During the pandemic, the district applied for and received a grant to support McKinney-Vento outreach services," Superintendent, Elaine Kane said. "We used the grant to create and compensate liaisons in each school. The grant has ended and so have those school-based positions."

The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal program which provides funds for students experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

"The district still has a McKinney-Vento coordinator, Mike Bellm, and a district level liaison, Shondalyn Wheeler," Kane said.

The homeless liaison is a person mandated by the McKinney-Vento Act. They connect with students dealing with homelessness or housing instability, and they can provide resources and supplies.

Career and Technical education teacher Chris Petrea used to be the liaison for Alton High School in previous years.

"The McKinney-Vento Act had grants at the time that helped pay bills or pay for things like a hotel room or we bought school supplies, food and clothes depending on what it was," Petrea said.

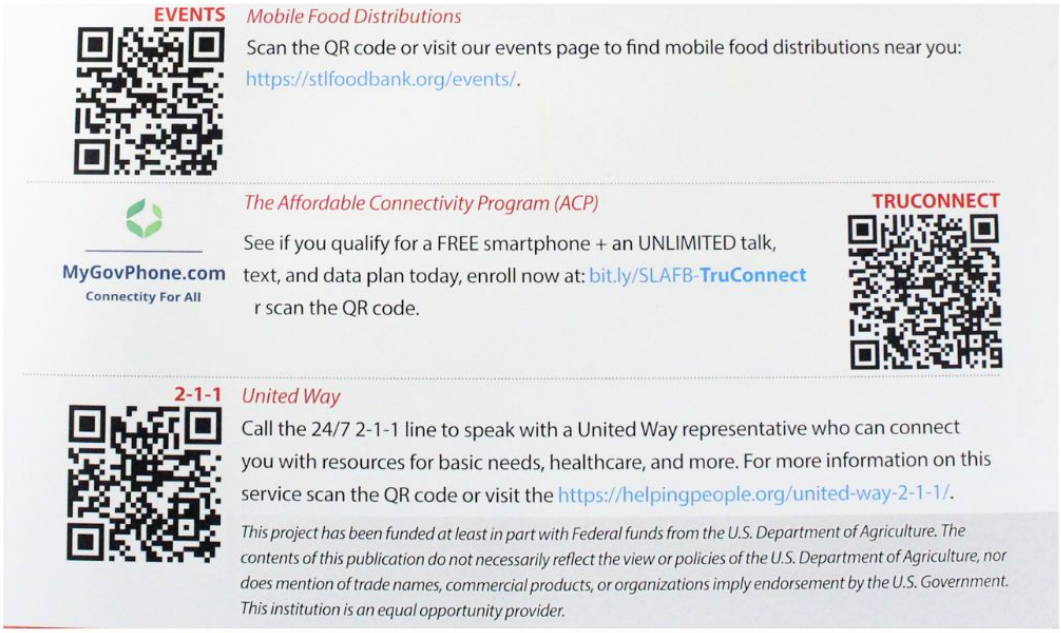
Petrea noted that some Alton High staff still have supplies in their classrooms from previous years, including herself.

"We have deodorant, shampoo and toiletries," Petrea said. "We [nurses, teachers and social workers] still have a lot of that stuff from previous years that we give out when kids come and need any of that. When teachers hear about it, they usually let me know, then I try to get something ready for those kids privately."

Each school has social workers trained to support students dealing with housing instability. Students can visit social workers and they can receive information about resources to help with house instability. Not only that, but staff members can also gather information for students.

"I always try to explain that I am not sharing their information, and I am not going to tell anybody," Petrea said. "But I want to help them, and I want them to know that they can come to me. I am not the only one that does that. I know there are a lot of teachers, counselors and social workers that help."

Even though the high school does not have a designated liaison for the building, staff members like Petrea and those at the district level still use remaining resources to support students worried about consistent and safe housing.


EVENTS
Mobile Food Distributions
Scan the QR code or visit our events page to find mobile food distributions near you:
https://stlfoodbank.org/events/.
MyGovPhone.com
Connectity For All
The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)
See if you qualify for a FREE smartphone + an UNLIMITED talk, text, and data plan today, enroll now at: bit.ly/SLAFB-TruConnect
r scan the QR code.
TRUCONNECT
2-1-1
United Way
Call the 24/7 2-1-1 line to speak with a United Way representative who can connect you with resources for basic needs, healthcare, and more. For more information on this service scan the QR code or visit the https://helpingpeople.org/united-way-2-1-1/.
This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Resources found in Student Services for students that may need help with essential needs.
Photo sourced by Victoria Strowmatt

EXCELLENCE IN ACTION

Minority Excellence Prepares Students for Life After High School

By Heaven Everage, Sports Editor

For many students, the path to college can feel overwhelming. Minority Excellence makes it clearer and more achievable, offering support and resources to juniors and seniors with a 2.5 GPA or higher to confidently pursue higher education.

The club's sponsor, math teacher Deshaun Pinnix, became involved when he first started teaching and was given the opportunity to shape the organization into something meaningful.

"I wanted it to be a group where students can come, get information and prepare for what's next after high school," Pinnix said.

Throughout the year, Minority Excellence offers help with college applications, scholarships, Free Application for Federal Student Aid and campus visits. Members receive hands-on support as they explore college options and learn to navigate the admissions process.

Seniors who meet participation goals can earn a graduation cord by completing five hours of community service and attending at least five meetings each semester. The cord recognizes their commitment to academic growth and community involvement. Volunteer opportunities also help members gain experience that strengthens their college applications.

The club's smaller size has been one of its challenges, partly due to busy upperclassman schedules.

"Because it's mainly offered to juniors and seniors, and they have jobs, there's often a conflict of scheduling," Pinnix said. "I'm looking to move meetings to advisory to help accommodate those students."

Despite the challenges, Pinnix remains dedicated to making the club accessible. By adjusting meeting times and promoting flexible involvement, he hopes to encourage steady participation throughout the year.

For senior Brianna Harrell, Minority Excellence is an opportunity to grow and connect with others who share similar goals.

"I am interested in joining to create new bonds and learn about things I have not heard of," Harrell said. "It will also help me gain more resources for college."

Harrell also said she believes the club could reach more students with better promotion.

"Some students have not joined because it is not really out there," Harrell said. "The club could make posters or have more leaders reaching out to people endorsing it."

Pinnix encourages any student uncertain about joining to give it a try.

"The only way to really figure it out is to attend, and if you don't think it's right for you, you can always leave," Pinnix said.

"Any student who wants to pursue something after high school, whether a four-year university, two-year college or vocational school, should try out Minority Excellence and see what resources they can gain."

As the club continues to grow, Pinnix said he hopes Minority Excellence will leave a lasting legacy on the school community.

"My goal for Minority Excellence is to have at least the same effect on students as National Honor Society, Talent Search and Upward Bound," Pinnix said. "I want to give students the tools and advice they need so they're not walking into college blindly."

With continued effort and engagement, Minority Excellence is building a foundation for student success, one meeting, one conversation and one future at a time to confidently pursue higher education.

The official logo of the Minority Excellence organization, featuring two students holding a trophy and two students holding hands, representing empowerment. Photo sourced by Heaven Everage, Sports Editor

Drinking and Driving Causes Tragedy in the Community

By Lily Waltz, Features Editor

The problem of drinking and driving has been an issue for decades. The cost of the decision to drive drunk has been proven to ruin the lives of the driver and other families affected.

This problem has recently become deeply personal for many in the Alton community with the loss of a fellow student, senior Grace Bustos. On Oct. 3, Bustos and her mother were hit by a drunk driver, impacting the lives of many in the community. For social worker McKenna Riley, she thinks the issue of drunk driving needs to become more vocalized.

"I think, unfortunately, it takes something as devastating as this to get people to talk about this because I think it is something that happens often, but is swept under the rug unless something devastating like this happens," Riley said. "It shouldn't be that way. It shouldn't take someone losing their life and someone going to jail for us to talk about how big of an issue it is."

Drunk driving incidents do happen much more than some might think, and for School Resource Officer Brad Woelfel, he sees these incidents firsthand.

According to the Illinois Department of Transportation, almost 47% of motor vehicle fatalities involve alcohol and the rates are increasing.

"When you're intoxicated, your senses aren't where they should be; they are dulled, your reflexes aren't as fast, so you can't swerve, stop or turn in time to avoid a crash," Woelfel said. "And that's what causes a lot of the DUI crashes. They're too drunk and impaired to where they're not thinking correctly."

Psychologically, alcohol can affect each person differently, but it does directly affect how the brain functions. Psychology teacher, Sarah Thomas, explained how severe drunk driving can affect the driver's brain.

"Alcohol affects the neurotransmitters acetylcholine and glutamate, depressing their release in the brain," Thomas said. "Acetylcholine helps the brain with memory and cognitive functioning and becomes depressed when drinking, so they might have difficulty remembering how much they drank."

With alcohol being a depressant, Thomas shared how it slows down the activity of the central nervous system, which is what ultimately affects the driver's mood and judgement.

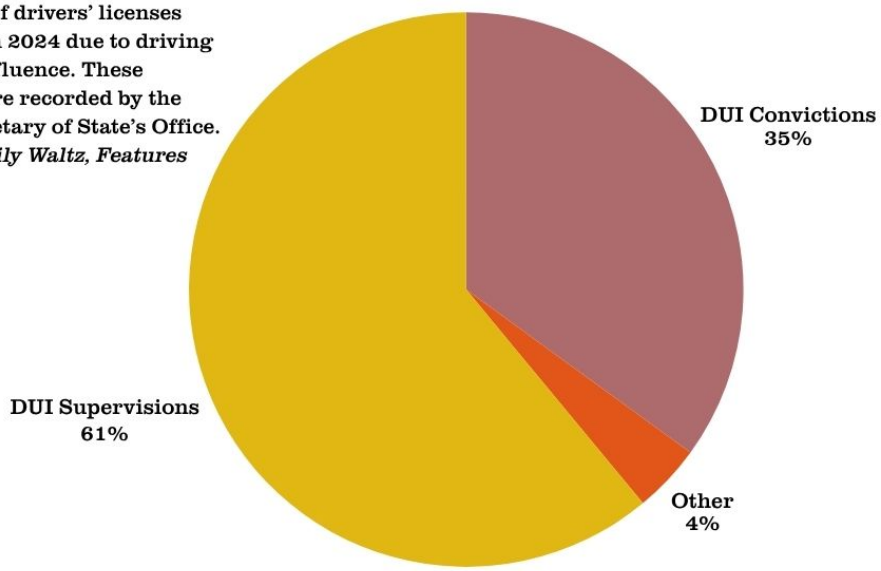
"Their brain's ability to make decisions is worsened so they can make bad decisions like getting behind the wheel of a car," Thomas said. "Drunk people also do not see colors the same way as a sober person. They have a difficult time distinguishing between red and green."

In many instances, addiction and alcohol abuse play a large role in making a decision such as drinking and driving. To help combat this decision, there are many opportunities for people to reach out and receive help, such as counseling or rehabilitation.

"I think counseling can help people to figure out why it is that they're seeking out drugs or alcohol, feelings they're trying to cover up or what they're trying to escape," Riley said.

The problems that can erupt from someone drinking and driving are much too serious. For students and adults alike, having a safe plan is much more important than getting behind the wheel: it can save lives.

Percentage of drivers' licenses suspended in 2024 due to driving under the influence. These statistics were recorded by the Illinois Secretary of State's Office. *Created by Lily Waltz, Features Editor*



COST OF A DRINK

THEN VS. NOW

From Typewriters to TikTok, The Redbird Word Embraces Technological Changes

By Finn Lile, News Editor

Throughout the 100 years that The Redbird Word has been around, the production process has changed drastically. From typewriters to modern computers, the tools for publishing the school newspaper have grown with each class at Alton High School.

Currently, The Redbird Word is mainly put together with the online graphic design platform, Canva, and technology like digital cameras and computers. Things were very different in 1970 when Diana Maul Halstead worked on the paper alongside her fellow editors.

"We had typewriters, some manual and some electric, and we typed every story to fit the required column widths and margins," Halstead said. "When everything was ready, we pasted the stories and photos onto a galley sheet by hand to create the layout. We used wax or glue to hold the pieces in place, then sent the finished boards to the printer for production."

As opposed to using video or voice recordings to accurately capture an interviewee's words, 55 years ago, things were a little more "classic," Halstead said.

"I talked with classmates, teachers or local business owners and wrote as fast as I could while they spoke," Halstead said. "If I missed a word or two, I filled it in right after the conversation while it was still fresh in my mind."

With the changing times, there have also been roles added to The Redbird Word staff, one of which is social media managers. The most recent social media manager, Sophie Doering, handled informative posts during the 2024-25 school year.

"When it came to the writing, videoing, and the photo taking parts of the journalism class, there were very few times when I felt I needed more or better equipment," Doering said. "I was very fortunate to have equipment that helped me design posts and infographics that made sure that the student body got the information they needed."

When it came to social media, Doering said it was challenging to create different types of graphics that appeal to the student body and also tell them what they need to know.

"When you are a social media manager, it is hard to choose the content that works for the different groups of the student body," Doering said. "Each person has a different opinion, but when you are working with social media, you have to find a way to appeal to everyone."

Though the times have changed, the effect of working on The Redbird Word has stayed everlasting and strong.

"In the last Redbird Word of my senior year, May 1970, my poem appeared on the front page surrounded by a collage of photos I designed," Halstead said. "It was my way of capturing our class's memories and spirit as we closed one chapter and stepped into another. Looking back, I realize that moment reflected everything The Redbird Word meant to me, a blend of creativity, collaboration and pride in telling our own story."

No matter what changes The Redbird Word goes through, it will always be a means of self-expression and sharing information for students, even in the far future.

Members of the 1973 Redbird Word staff pose for their photos to be taken.
Photo Courtesy of Janet Long Brehm

Members of the Redbird Word staff pose for the 2024-2025 Tatler yearbook.
Photo by Wagner Portrait Group

EDITORIAL

Check out our digital content!

Thanksgiving Drives Families to Ignore Heavy Obligations and Demands

By Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

With the season of pumpkin pie, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade and new brown sweaters comes an abundance of days off work and an expectation to gather the whole family. Since the beginning of the federal holiday, there has always been the underlying truth that Thanksgiving is not enjoyable for everyone. Thanksgiving brings heavy emotional and physical burdens, societal expectations to fit the standard of a "happy family" and a list of historical lies.

Along with every Thanksgiving feast is the abundance of pressure and pain through the labor of the holiday. Grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, planning, hosting and welcoming - all of this usually falls on one house and one person. Psychologists Janelle E. Wells and Doreen MacAulay with Psychology Today state that, "Gatherings tend to place unique emotional demands on hosts, who often bear responsibility for managing tensions to create an enjoyable experience for all."

Past the general physical demand, the financial strain on the host continues to rise along with the price of other basic groceries. The cost for one family to celebrate continuously increases with the prices of basic necessities. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, "The cost [of Thanksgiving] is still 25% higher compared to 2019."

However, as each family is at least somewhat affected by the price, families are also affected by the mentality of the holiday. Emotional distress and physical ache are a lot for a day dedicated to appreciation and gratitude.

Past the logistics of frustration from the host, it also brings forward the stress of difficult personal connections. The holiday is often played as an opportunity to reunite with family and put any previous arguments aside. For many families in search of escaping an abusive or generally unenjoyable situation, Thanksgiving can feel more like an obligation than a celebration.

In many cases, personal tensions or general disagreements will get in the way of that. In an interview with CBS, psychiatrist Joseph Sharpe said, "A new survey says 64% of Americans said election-related stress is impacting their holiday plans and 23% are considering skipping Thanksgiving altogether." Not everyone gets along with their family, or even necessarily has one, so feeling obligated to sit through the longest meal of the year might not be ideal for some.

Furthermore, the truth behind the holiday itself rightfully drags many people's attention away from the aspect of gratitude. The process of colonization and mass genocide that took place before the first Thanksgiving has always been one of the most controversial dinner table topics, becoming increasingly more apparent year-after-year.

According to Christophe Boucher, an associate professor of Native American history at the College of Charleston, "Native Americans do not see Thanksgiving as a cause for celebration. For them, it is a reminder that contact with Europeans has had cataclysmic effects that left them with little political power and hastened their disenfranchisement." The cultural destruction behind the holiday, which forced many Native people to mourn the loss of their families, makes Americans constantly question their willingness to whitewash and dismiss the importance of this history.

Stepping away from the holiday does not deem someone ungrateful or careless. Traditions are made to either evolve or end. Thanksgiving does not have to feel like an obligation or a ritual. It can be reimagined or even just disregarded for the sake of one's mental health.

Families deserve to ignore a holiday as an act of reclaiming the endlessly spent energy, money, time and historical narrative. To be grateful does not require pumpkin pie, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade or new brown sweaters.

Fall Word Search

How many can you find?

F	E	T	F	P	W	Z	P	P	T	J	Q
E	O	K	C	X	E	N	R	D	T	E	P
S	R	O	W	A	N	G	E	U	H	R	U
F	O	F	T	R	R	O	T	M	E	X	F
I	W	T	Z	B	X	T	T	X	N	V	F
S	A	Y	I	N	A	L	S	T	D	S	E
D	U	U	K	Y	Y	L	E	I	H	P	L
M	N	O	I	T	H	E	L	Y	D	L	F
R	Y	V	N	T	E	R	A	N	D	K	U
T	K	C	G	U	P	L	A	Y	E	Q	V
T	R	O	C	O	M	M	U	N	I	T	Y
H	D	O	T	H	A	N	K	F	U	L	G

Football
Puff
King
Then
Community
Play
Thankful
Distract